

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

## Gravesham Borough Council

**Report to:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 6 November 2023  
**Reporting officer:** Jamie Izzard, Director of Communities & Inclusive Growth  
**Subject:** Community Safety and Crime Update

### Purpose and summary of report:

This report provides an overview of current rates of recorded crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) within the Borough and the associated actions being taken by the Council, the Police and other members of the Community Safety Partnership, to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

### Recommendations:

1. Cabinet is asked to note the report.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
<b>Legal</b>	The Council's key statutory obligations in respect of Community Safety are governed by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which requires the Council to work in partnership with other specified authorities in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).
<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	There are no financial implications emanating from the content of this report.
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	Activity aimed at reducing crime and ASB makes a direct contribution to improving public safety linked to People and Place in the Corporate Plan.
<b>Climate Change</b>	The subject matter of this report has no impact on climate change.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 At the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023, the Leader committed to bringing forward an update report on crime and fear of crime within Gravesham. This reports sets out that update, which is presented to Cabinet for information only.

## 2. Crime rates in Gravesham

In considering Kent Police recorded crime data, it is important to underline the fact that whilst the Council is very committed to working in partnership with all of our statutory partners in reducing crime in our Borough (and the Local Authority has a number of powers and tools that it can and does use to support that endeavour) it is not a primary law enforcement agency when it comes to tackling criminal behaviour. The key agencies with that remit remain Kent Police and the Probation Service.

### Total Crime:

- 2.1 All Districts in Kent (bar Tonbridge and Malling) have recorded a decrease in total crime with an average reduction countywide of 4.7%. During the same period Gravesham has recorded the third greatest decrease of 7.8%, further reducing the rate of total crime per 1,000 population in the Borough to 100.1 offences. Whilst this still remains higher than the average Kent rate of 92.5 offences, this is an indication of improvement being sustained and that crime locally is falling at a faster rate than in most parts of the county.

Area	Sep 21- Aug 22	Sep 22- Aug 23	No. change	% change	Per 1,000 popn
Ashford	11,838	10,972	-866	-7.3	82.7
Canterbury	15,506	15,179	-327	-2.1	96.4
Dartford	13,028	12,228	-800	-6.1	104.7
Dover	11,160	10,888	-272	-2.4	93.5
Folkestone and Hythe	10,382	9,401	-981	-9.4	85.6
<b>Gravesham</b>	<b>11,600</b>	<b>10,701</b>	<b>-899</b>	<b>-7.8</b>	<b>100.1</b>
Maidstone	16,009	15,480	-529	-3.3	88.0
Medway	32,325	30,513	-1,812	-5.6	109.0
Sevenoaks	8,029	7,769	-260	-3.2	64.5
Swale	15,475	15,066	-409	-2.6	99.3
Thanet	18,025	16,504	-1,521	-8.4	117.4
Tonbridge and Malling	8,861	9,142	281	3.2	69.1
Tunbridge Wells	7,913	7,858	-55	-0.7	68.1
<b>Kent</b>	<b>180,151</b>	<b>171,701</b>	<b>-8,450</b>	<b>-4.7</b>	<b>92.5</b>

*Table 1. Kent Police Total Recorded Crime – Kent District and Medway Comparisons*

### Violent Crime:

- 2.2 The level of violent crime (violence against the person, sexual offences, and robbery) recorded in the 12 months ending August 2023 has continued to fall quite significantly with 659 fewer offences and a decrease of 11.8% achieved. This compares to an average reduction seen across the county of 9.1%.
- 2.3 The rate of violent crime per 1,000 population in Gravesham now stands at 45.9 offences, the gap continuing to close between the local rate and the Kent average rate of 43.7 offences. Additionally, violent crime in Gravesham this year represents an 11.1% reduction against violent crime recorded in the 12 months ending August 2019 (pre-pandemic year) whereas the Kent wide average reduction when comparing the two years is a decrease of 5.0%. Violent crime is currently at the lowest level since 2017.

- 2.4 Stalking and harassment offences have continued to decline steadily after increases seen during the pandemic. Whilst these offences still account for almost a third of all offences within the violence against the person category, most of this activity is online/cyberstalking.
- 2.5 The number of sexual offences remains small, with only the category rape having seen a nominal increase of 3 more offences than in the previous year.
- 2.6 Offences of most serious violence are generally rare and have fallen by almost a quarter (24.2%) in the most recent rolling year compared to the previous 12 month period.
- 2.7 Robbery offences are small in number but have still seen a very good reduction of 26.2% from 126 to 93 robberies recorded in the most recent year. This is also significantly greater than the average decrease achieved across Districts and Medway of 14.3%.

#### Burglary:

- 2.8 The number of burglary offences in the most recent 12 months has fallen by 6.3% (23 fewer residential burglaries) and translating to a rate of approximately 8 offences per 1,000 households. Of the total 126 residential burglary offences recorded, 89 related to burglary of a home and 37 to burglary of an unconnected residential building e.g. workshop/shed.
- 2.9 Burglary affecting business and community buildings has seen a significant reduction of 28.8% (36 fewer offences). This is the second greatest reduction achieved in any area and a significantly greater decrease than the 9.8% average reduction seen countywide.

#### Motor vehicle crime:

- 2.10 In the year ending August 2023, Gravesham recorded a fall of 26.4% in theft of motor vehicle offences compared to an average decrease across North Division of 10.3% and a countywide average reduction of 2.9%. Equally encouraging is the reduction seen in theft from motor vehicle offences; Gravesham has recorded a decrease of 15.6% compared to an average reduction of 6.7% across North Division and an average fall of 6.5% across Kent.

#### Theft and handling stolen goods:

- 2.11 Theft and handling stolen goods (THSG) offences were fully expected to begin rising following the reopening of businesses and a resumption of normal trading and to stabilise after the height of the pandemic. In the most recent 12 months ending August 2023, THSG offences have remained stable in Gravesham with a small reduction of 0.5% (8 fewer offences) having been recorded. This should also be considered in light of the fact that Gravesham was only one of 2 areas to record a reduction at all – across the county, THSG offences have increased by 9.9%. The local rate of offences per 1,000 population, at 15.0 offences is now directly aligned to the Kent average.
- 2.12 The cost of living crisis and financial hardship being faced by many and the potential for this to lead to a rise in shoplifting has been a topic of national debate in recent months. The experience locally appears to be contrary to that of other areas. Locally shoplifting offences have fallen by 4.8% and the only other area to record a reduction was Folkestone and Hythe (0.7%). The county as a whole has seen shoplifting increase by almost a fifth (19.7%).

### Environmental crime:

- 2.13 The number of arson offences in Gravesham in the most recent 12 months, have fallen considerably by 54.0% - the greatest reduction recorded in any area countywide. However, monthly pattern analysis indicates that of the 29 arson offences recorded, 14 of these took place between June and August this year. Denton (Riverside Ward) remains a priority area for deliberate fires and all partner agencies are now working together to try to resolve both this and other crime/ASB issues through the Project Denton Working Group.
- 2.14 Criminal damage offences have also seen a further reduction of 6.9% and the rate of offences per 1,000 population in Gravesham (11.5 offences) is now very closely aligned to the Kent average of 11.1 offences. This is very positive, given that the Borough has historically experienced a much greater prevalence of criminal damage/vandalism.
- 2.15 The Council has taken a very proactive approach to tackling environmental crime, particularly in respect of fly-tipping. In the first 6 months of the current financial year, the Environmental Enforcement Team have taken 258 enforcement actions compared to 179 actions in the same period last year. Successful prosecutions, with offenders receiving very significant fines, has been very well-publicised. This in turn helps build public confidence that reporting fly-tipping and providing information is worthwhile because reports will be fully investigated and formal action taken whenever appropriate.

### Drug offences:

- 2.16 In the last few months, Kent Police have instigated intense enforcement activity in respect of drug-related crime. Drug trafficking offences have increased in Gravesham by 322.2% from 90 to 380 offences in the most recent 12 months compared to the previous year. This is by far the greatest increase recorded in the county and compares to a countywide increase of 106.4%. It is very likely that this increase is due to the very proactive policing approach taken locally and the decision of Kent Police to tackle drug supply and county lines activity as a matter of priority rather than an indication of a dramatic increase in offences. This should also be seen as a very positive demonstrator of activity that is effectively reducing the availability of drugs on our streets and in our Borough through the apprehension and prosecution of suppliers and dealers.

### Police reported Anti-Social Behaviour

- 2.17 Gravesham has seen an increase in ASB incidents of 9.9% and the rate of offences per 1,000 population (20.8) remains the highest in the county. However, this should not be interpreted negatively. Tackling ASB has continued to be treated as a very high community safety priority with strong and constant public messaging encouraging a zero tolerance stance and emphasising the importance reporting of incidents to the Police and/or to other appropriate agencies. ASB Awareness Week 2023 saw a real drive in raising awareness of how to report ASB aligned with the revision of the Council's Community Safety web pages, making it easier for people to report issues online. All community engagement events attended by CSU staff are seen as an opportunity to inform local people of how to report different types of ASB and the practical support that is available for repeat victims of ASB, particularly for victims with complex needs/vulnerabilities. Both the Council's CSU and Kent Police have been seeing an increase in the number of reports received.
- 2.18 As always, it is important to remember that a large quantity of repeat calls that are recorded as separate ASB incidents may be from only a very small number of individuals e.g., individuals who are persistent complainants prompted to report due

to mental health conditions or conversely, individuals who are inadvertently behaving in a way that is causing a disturbance to other due to mental health factors that then generates a high volume of calls.

### **3. Perceptions of crime in Gravesham**

- 3.1 Despite the overall reduction in crime across the Borough, fear of crime remains a major issue for residents and visitors, particularly within Gravesend Town Centre. Isolated cases of violent crime often receive significant press and social media attention and can lead to rumours and falsehoods spreading online. Prominent anti-social behaviour from street drinkers and large numbers of school age children in certain parts of the town centre are also contributors to this overall perception of crime being on the rise, when it is in fact falling under nearly all measures.
- 3.2 Council officers recently carried out a Nighttime Economy Audit, spending the evening in Gravesend Town Centre speaking to members of the public and reviewing how safe venues and public spaces felt. When members of the public were asked how safe they felt in Gravesend Town Centre of an evening, the most common response was a rating of 7 out of 10. This figure would however look very different if the question was asked of people who do not go into the town centre at night, suggesting that those using the town centre of an evening are more likely to feel safe than those put off by social media or local news stories.
- 3.3 A common theme when discussing feelings of safety in Gravesend town centre of an evening, is that people feel less safe when an area is quiet. Since the start of the pandemic, the town centre's nighttime economy has declined, with less late-night venues and a subsequent reduction in footfall. Whilst this has also had a positive impact on crime levels and anti-social behaviour, it has conversely made the town centre feel empty at night.
- 3.4 In order to address this issue and support the development of a thriving evening economy, work is underway to develop a stronger family friendly early evening ('twilight') economy. This work will build upon the recent partnership with the Government's High Streets Taskforce, prioritise the Twilight Economy as part of a wider Town Centre Vision and measure its impact and growth through the emerging Economic Development strategy ('Business Gravesham'). Increasing footfall will not only help people to feel safer, it will also provide a greater element of 'self-policing'.

### **4. Area Based Action – Town Centre**

- 4.1 Renewal of the Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for a further three years, making the majority of the geographical area within Gravesend town centre an Alcohol Control Zone. This is not an outright ban on the drinking of alcohol in public but rather a tool to provide both Police and Council Officers with the powers to seize/confiscate alcohol where the individuals consuming are causing ASB or a nuisance. Failure to comply with an Officer's request to hand over open containers of alcohol or to continue drinking once having been asked to stop constitutes a breach of the Order and Officers can then issue a Fixed Penalty Notice. PSPO powers have been used by Kent Police – there have been many occasions when alcohol has been seized and individuals moved on/advised to go home. 22 FPNs have been issued between April 2021-September 2023 and 6 of these went on to receive court fines ranging from £100-£500. The Council's Community Safety Unit is currently working with our Communications Team in order that the renewed PSPO can be well-publicised when it comes into effect. New signage is also going to be designed that will be more effective in communicating

that the PSPO is in place and actions that will be taken if an individual is drinking alcohol in the area and creating a nuisance.

- 4.2 Gravesend town centre is a priority area for Kent Police, the Council and other statutory partners of the Gravesend Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The further roll-out of the new Neighbourhood Policing Model has recently been supported by an increase in Neighbourhood Officers for the Borough and this should result in the greater visibility of Police patrols within the town centre, with Queen Street certainly being a specific location for additional attention. This should increase capacity for dealing not just with alcohol-related ASB but also with other forms of nuisance, increase reassurance through greater Police presence and hopefully act as a deterrent to crime. The area has been patrolled regularly by the new Neighbourhood Task Force and on 18 October, Officers arrested a prolific and persistent street-drinker. This person has been charged and is due to appear in court in December when Police colleagues will also be seeking a Criminal Behaviour Order from the court. If granted, the Order will include conditions to which the individual must adhere, the breach of which would result in arrest. This will hopefully send a message to other individuals engaging in similar behaviour that Police will not hesitate to take formal action through the courts when that is appropriate.
- 4.3 Homelessness - Although it is not always the case, many individuals who are street-drinking are also homeless. The Council has a very proactive Homelessness Team which works closely with any individual presenting as homeless not just in trying to find them accommodation but also in encouraging them to access services and support to help them deal with other issues they are facing. A key agency is Change, Grow, Live (the local commissioned drug and alcohol treatment provider) and Council officers regularly signpost or refer individuals to this service. Where individuals are found to have multiple, complex needs e.g. they are homeless, have mental health issues, are drug and/or alcohol dependent etc., they are frequently referred to the CSP's Vulnerability Panel. This multi-agency Panel, with representation across a wide range of both statutory and voluntary sector agencies, considers how each agency can potentially contribute to helping the individual change their behaviour. This process has had some very good results, often seeing individuals move to outside the area and being supported to overcome their problems.
- 4.4 Persistent offenders – persistent offenders who commit crime and cause ASB are a matter for Kent Police rather than Council Officers. Part of our role is to raise awareness of the importance of reporting incidents and emphasising that unless problems are being reported Police colleagues cannot respond effectively. Council officers and Members are advised to encourage any members of the public to always report using 101 or Crimestoppers (tel. 0800 555111) to assist both Police and other partner agencies in understanding the issues and identifying potential solutions.
- 4.5 Licensing control - The Council's Licensing Team works very closely with Kent Police Licensing Officers. They routinely make joint visits to off-licences and other premises selling alcohol to ensure that they are not selling alcohol irresponsibly or operating outside of their licensing conditions. Formal action is taken where appropriate where conditions are found to have been breached. Premises selling alcohol in and around the vicinity of Queen Street continue to be given attention and reports of irresponsible sales/breaches are fully always investigated.
- 4.6 We actively encourage members of the public and businesses through regular engagement with them either working in collaboration with G-Safe (Business Crime Reduction Initiative) or through public engagement activities in the area to report incidents of ASB when they are taking place. This will help Police build a more

accurate picture of when problems are occurring in order that they can target their resources more effectively, it also makes it easier to identify new target-hardening measures that could potentially be adopted to make changes to the environment to help 'design out' opportunities for crime and ASB.

- 4.7 Street lighting improvements – work to upgrade some of the heritage street lighting including in and around this area is scheduled to take place later this year and is expected to have been completed by early-mid January 2024. Half the costs of these works have been met through Gravesham's Safer Streets Project following a successful bid to the Home Office in collaboration with the Office of the Kent and Medway PCC.
- 4.8 Designing out crime/ASB – consideration is given on an ongoing basis to any steps that could be taken to re-design/make small changes to the physical environment to make it more difficult for individuals or groups to gather and cause a nuisance. Clearly such works will be subject to financial resources being available but we are also hoping to be able to work in collaboration with local businesses either by advising them of cost-effective steps that they themselves could take to reduce ASB affecting their own and immediately surrounding premises and/or explore any potential for jointly funding measures that could be implemented.
- 4.9 Supporting businesses – Both the Council and Kent Police work closely with the G-Safe Scheme whose members are primarily located in the town centre. Through Safer Streets Project, G-Safe has acquired 20 new radios which are being made available to local businesses free of charge for 6-months in order that they can test the benefits of joining G-Safe and whether they would want to become members. G-Safe enables businesses to share information in real-time and this is particularly helpful to both town centre security staff and Policing Teams in identifying individuals involved in crime/ASB.
- 4.10 Safer socialising and public reassurance – we frequently hear that there are negative public perceptions of safety in the town centre, particularly during the nighttime economy. The Nighttime Economy Audit mentioned previously was completed between 5.00pm and 2.00am (Friday-Saturday) and one of the key messages from the public were that 'having people around' and good footfall was instrumental to whether they felt safe or unsafe. The Council has been working actively with business and retail premises in the town centre to encourage participation in several key projects to try to address this and to help people feel that Gravesend offers a safe socialising environment:
  - i) Best Bar None – to ensure that businesses operating in the NTE in particular run their business to the highest standards to promote safe socialising environments. Three premises have very recently gained Best Bar None Accreditation – all close to the Queen Street area: The Goose, The Robert Pocock and TJ's Pub. We are working hard to encourage others to follow suit. Please follow the link to recent media coverage: [TJ's, The Goose and The Robert Pocock Wetherspoon pubs in Gravesend recognised for safe environments \(kentonline.co.uk\)](#)
  - ii) Safe Space Initiative – over 20 businesses and retailers have now received staff training and offer a 'Safe Space' on their premises that can be accessed by anyone who happens to be in the area and finds themselves feeling vulnerable. Several case studies from participating businesses have already shown how beneficial having this scheme in operation is proving and feedback, especially from young people, has been very positive to date. Again, having schemes such as this in place will hopefully reassure members of the public and increase their confidence in visiting

and/or socialising in the town centre. Please follow the link for further information on the Safe Space Initiative and premises that are involved:  
[Safe spaces – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

## **5. Appendices**

5.1 There are no appendices.

## **6. Background Documents**

6.1 There are no background documents.

**Lead Officer:** Jamie Izzard, Director (Communities and Inclusive Growth)

**Email:** jamie.izzard@gravesham.gov.uk



<b>Secondary Implications</b>	
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Click here to start typing
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	<p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of <a href="#">personal data</a> or <a href="#">special category data</a> or <a href="#">criminal offence data</a>? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>N/A</p>
	<p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at <a href="mailto:gdpr@medway.gov.uk">gdpr@medway.gov.uk</a>.</p> <p>N/A</p>
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>No</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>Yes – Improving community safety will positively support all members of the community.</p>
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The Council has a range of legal obligations to work in partnership to improve community safety. Activities and initiatives mentioned in this report contribute to crime prevention and protecting people from harm.
<b>Digital and website implications</b>	None.
<b>Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults</b>	Community safety activity led by the Council and through operational groups of Gravesham Community Safety Partnership all contribute to the safeguarding agenda.